

VZCZCXRO6928

OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #1305/01 1951420
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 141420Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1916
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001305

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTEST FALLOUT: LOTS OF LOSERS, BUT WILL
THERE BE WINNERS?

REF: A. TBILISI 1303

[1](#)B. TBILISI 1304

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary/Comment: This is the third in a series of three cables reviewing the longer term implications of the protests in Tbilisi this spring. The ultimate fallout from the protests which began in April is still to be determined. Some political actors among the non-parliamentary opposition are likely to fade into relative obscurity, while others look to play a greatly diminished role. Only Irakli Alasania and the National Forum have emerged from the protests largely undamaged, but they still face questions about their political viability. The GoG and President Saakashvili seem to have succeeded in diminishing their foes through patience and calls for dialogue, however the GoG still faces dissatisfaction with their efforts and the public is left craving concrete reforms. In the end, the ultimate winner might be Georgia's democracy as the electorate appears to have begun to focus more on policy and results than on overheated, exaggerated rhetoric from either side. Although the non-parliamentary opposition was the clear loser, it is hard to name a winner. The onus now is squarely on the GoG to incorporate more voices into the political mainstream, a daunting and challenging task. End Summary/Comment.

Stick a Fork In Them

[1](#)2. (C) A number of non-parliamentary leaders are unlikely to recover from the political damage done as a result of the protests. Nino Burjanadze (National Movement - Democratic Union), Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), Levan Gachechiladze, David Gamkrelidze (New Rights), and David Usupashvili (Republicans) all view themselves as Presidential material though it is hard to imagine any of these individuals playing anything other than a minor role in electoral politics. As a group, they will still command a fair bit of political cache but largely represent past figures whose best political days are likely behind them. The oversized egos and evident lack of political acumen of Burjanadze, Zourabichvili, Gachechiladze and Gamkrelidze will make it difficult for any of them to accept a secondary role in another political party. In fact, Gachechiladze recently announced the formation of his quasi political party - Protect Georgia. Usupashvili might possibly migrate to being a secondary figure in Alasania's camp but it is difficult to see any of the others doing the work necessary to build a party and regain their former political stature. Alasania's plans to announce his own party within the week, shows that he might be looking to distance himself from Usupashvili and Gamkrelidze.

A Positive Dynamic?

[1](#)3. (C) The National Forum, a group that hit its stride during the protests (septel), left the protests early and decided not to take part in the May 26 rally at Dynamo

stadium. National Forum was the first group to remove their cells from Freedom Square. This party lead by Kahka Shartava and Gubaz Sanikidze appears to have a fair amount of political instinct and an ability to read the mood of the country, in sharp contrast to many of their non-parliamentary colleagues. National Forum has received praise from other party representatives for its willingness to work in the regions and pursue politics at a grass roots level. Their stated focus is on upcoming local elections and party building rather than street politics. This coupled with their willingness to do the necessary hard work to build a real political party, represents a positive development. Unlike the majority of their colleagues, the National Forum has been out in the regions listening to the public's concerns and adjusting their tactics and message accordingly.

The National Forum is also approaching opposition parliamentarians hoping to form alliances, as they now recognize the need for a voice in the government.

14. (C) Likewise, Alasania has emerged largely unscathed from his participation in the protests. Alasania has approached the International Republican Institute (IRI) for help building his party. He seems convinced his positive ratings are a result of the perception that he intends to pursue a more moderate, constructive course than his allies. Alasania appears to have all but dropped demands for Saakashvili's resignation, and has stated he intends to start working at a grass roots level in the regions. It remains to be seen if Alasania will be successful but his newfound focus on party building and issue-based politics represents a positive move away from the streets. His intention to announce his own party shows that he understands the need to

TBILISI 00001305 002 OF 002

build on his relative popularity rather than relying on the weak parties of Gamkrelidze and Usupashvili.

GoG - Don't Pop Any Champagne

15. (C) Despite temporarily being in a stronger political position than in March or April, the GoG has not "won" in any traditional sense. The government cannot count on the haplessness of the non-parliamentary opposition as a political safety blanket forever. In fact, polls show us that many Georgians believe the onus is on the government to build the fertile ground necessary for future democratic development. The GoG now must follow through on the democratic reforms they promised to the Georgian public. The government faces serious trust and credibility problems with roughly one-third of the public. Pursuing and implementing promised reforms is the best way to build credibility with this segment of the population. The GoG, if it is wise, will recognize that the development of the National Forum, Alasania's (yet unnamed) political party or others does not represent a threat, but rather an opportunity to incorporate more moderate and constructive voices into traditional political institutions. The more voices incorporated into the political process, the less incentive there is to stage constant protests.

More Protests? Of Course This IS Georgia

16. (C) Without a doubt the GoG's handling of the protests and the non-parliamentary opposition's tactics and failure to achieve tangible results have discredited the idea of taking to the street as a substitute for normal political discourse.

Nevertheless, Georgia still has a number of non-parliamentary professional protesters who will almost assuredly stage protests again in the fall on one pretext or another. For these politicians, including Levan Gachechiladze, they built themselves on street politics and know no other way. In spite of this, the non-parliamentary opposition is unlikely to be as united or contain as many big names as it did this spring. Barring a major political mishap or significant economic unrest, we suspect the

non-parliamentary opposition will have a hard time rallying significant support to compel the GoG to respond in upcoming protests. The positive note is that the process from street politics to more traditional political discourse is underway; however, with Georgia's colorful political history, street politics can hardly be declared dead and buried.

TEFFT